

*Being a woman at Yale means living in a world
but the real world will show them that they are
but we must all learn to say ...*

Vive la différence!

Neomi Rao

ON THIS 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF CO-education at Yale, everything indicates that the transition has occurred smoothly. Women stand on equal footing in almost all aspects of student life.

In the meritocratic world that Yale has become, one hardly notices differences between the sexes. Celebrations and monuments to women all seem a little silly. Who understands anymore how being a woman is different? Is it biology? Brain structure? A heightened sensitivity? No one can really say.

After 25 years of coeducation, women still face a unique set of questions, questions which in the pursuit of equality we often ignore. Maybe men and women are fundamentally different. Our educational nurturing often masks differences in nature. For women, happiness requires more than a navy blue power suit.

Studying with the boys

So, most people ask, is there discrimination in the classroom? Do women have difficulty keeping up? Almost no one would say that discrimination occurs within the confines of the classroom. Equality in the classroom is pretty much de rigueur, according to women majoring in everything from physics to English.

But this should come as no surprise. Over the past decades, Yale has dedicated itself to a relatively firm meritocracy, which drops its standards only for a few minorities, some legacies and a football player here or there. Otherwise, a Yale student need have no privilege or status, only than a good mind. Women have undoubtedly benefited from such a standard, because a meritocracy cuts across traditional lines of gender bias.

Ability has become the universal standard for Yale students. It applies to both academics and activities.

Women edit the major newspapers, run things in the Yale Political Union and start their own groups when they see a need for it.

Danna Drori founded ECHO (Eating Concerns Hotline Outreach) to answer student questions about everything from eating disorders to general questions about healthy eating. The hotline serves as an intermediate step for students who don't necessarily want to seek formal counseling.

As Drori said, "If you take the initiative you can do whatever you want at Yale. I haven't felt restricted in anything that I've wanted to do."

The only area of possible discrimination seems to be up on Science Hill, where few science majors are women.

Yet this distribution seems a result of personal choice, rather than sexism. There are not many women majoring in theoretical physics or applied math, but those who do don't feel any discrimination.

Elizabeth Wellington, a senior

What feminine mystique?

Does studying with the boys demystify the relations between the sexes?

Mrs. Francie Field, who graduated in 1942 from Vassar, married a Yale man. When she attended his junior prom, from her wrist dangled a card which listed her partner for each dance. Her date made sure that she received a dance with all of his friends, and such notables as the captain of the football team.

Today, if a man handed a woman such a card, he would

ted as students into its large gothic buildings. Traditions evolved as our society changed, making students a little more cosmopolitan, and a lot more cynical.

The dance card might seem like a joke now, but at one time it represented all the magical excitement of courtship. Leaving school on the weekend and meeting your man under the clock at the Biltmore in New York—how different from the relationships of Yale, circa 1995.

Baby it's a wild world

So what happens when women



who designed a special divisional major in biology management, says that she has never experienced any discrimination: "Being a woman in the sciences, I never felt as though I was treated differently."

Women might feel intimidated by not seeing other women in science, but that's a personal choice. Yale really encourages you to do your own thing."

Many people speculate about the small number of female science majors. Is it some inherent difference in the mind? Social discrimination in elementary school?

Wellington said that women don't major in sciences because they "don't want to be with science geeks, and they don't want to turn into science geeks—although of course not all science majors are geeks. It's just the perception that you're going to spend all of your time alone with mice."

have to be prepared to endure fits of laughter and ridicule. In fact, holding open a door might receive a similar response. Liberation has surely brought the demise of certain social graces. But for women at Yale, it's tough to understand the trade-off. If a few more social graces means not attending Yale,

leave meritocratic Yale for the real world? Prepared for whatever careers await them alongside their male friends, women can compete for the most competitive jobs, for spots at the most elite graduate and professional schools. Yet for those who want to have families, they will have to step

"At Yale they encourage you to forget that you're a woman. If all the smart women go to Ivy League colleges and have careers and never have kids, then we'll have a big problem."

women today would certainly lose the dance card.

Old Yale did not vanish with coeducation. Its decline began well before women were admitted

outside all this for at least some amount of time, and confront the choices which face them.

Alana Zielinski '91, a member of the Reserve Officer Training

Corps (ROTC) as an undergraduate, said that her views about gender have changed dramatically since she was an undergraduate. She arrived at Yale believing in strict equality. "I thought that differences in gender lead to subjugation. I don't want to be subjugated, so therefore I'm not different."

But now, several years after Yale and Duke law school, Zielinski said, "Yale students are generally naive about gender issues ... Most women [there] have never been held back, never hit a wall they couldn't climb. They don't think that there are limitations, why should they? As you get older and start thinking about having a family, you make certain choices."

Many undergraduate women do seem aware that they will have to make certain choices, but this does not limit the way that they think about the future. Govindini Murty '97, vice chair of the Independent Party and former coordinator of the Women's Caucus of the Yale Political Union, said, "Women do have a harder time in the real world. But I plan to have a career and a family and do it all. I think it's all a matter of perception. I see the world as a place which is open to me. Obviously I will have to make trade-offs, but I don't think women focus on their limitations. They shouldn't feel victimized."

Most of the women interviewed for this article said that they have rarely, if ever, experienced any gender-based discrimination. Most also did not expect their career plans to hinder their desire to have families. But seniors heading into the unknown could not say with certainty how they would work in family commitments. Drori said, "I guess my friends and I don't talk that much about having families. We don't think that it's going to be huge problem—maybe that's naive."

Wellington, who wants to raise a family but also maintain a career, sees her future as somewhat of a challenge. "As a woman you have to be stronger. You just learn to balance the needs of others along with your own."

Certainly some women go into the world and balance successful careers with raising a family, but the questions they face in the real world will ultimately be different from the concerns of men. As